

Murder Trial
Globe

Spectators spellbound by Smart trial

By Judith Gaines
GLOBE STAFF

EXETER, N.H. - Six-twenty a.m. Wednesday. Dawn had barely streaked the sky. The Rockingham County Courthouse was not even open yet. But already spectators had begun to arrive.

Nearly three hours later - in a scene that one observer compared to a gathering for a medieval execution - more than 200 people had jammed into the main courtroom and two anterooms equipped with closed-circuit televisions to watch the accomplice-to-murder trial of Pamela Smart and the testimony of the three teen-agers who claim to have murdered at her behest.

Some gawked, some gasped, some stared. Others watched impassively as students Patrick Randall and then Vance Lattime began telling their lurid tales: how the captivating young teacher allegedly convinced them to kill Gregory Smart, a 24-year-old insurance salesman and her husband of less than a year, at their Derry condominium on May 1, 1990. Prosecutors allege Pamela Smart and the admitted gunman, 16-year-old William Flynn, were lovers.

About 30 of the spectators were family or friends. Relatives of Gregory and Pamela Smart sat on opposite sides of a courtroom aisle, no words passing between them.

Roughly 40 members of the media were on hand, with cameras and tape recorders and notepads - everyone from representatives of the "Gerald" show to the Ladies Home Journal, British

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tabloids, and at least one author writing a book about the case.

"Better than the soap operas"

But most of the onlookers were members of the general public, eager to witness the unfolding of a drama that several called "better than the soap operas."

New Hampshire's Channel 9 (WMUR) was broadcasting most of the proceedings live, so local residents could have watched it on TV. Still they came. Their numbers surprised even longtime courthouse employees.

The overflow audience was "very unusual for this place," one bailiff remarked. He estimated that court officers turned away at least 200 hopeful viewers Wednesday, and as many as 300 on Tuesday, when testimony began.

To impose order on the crowds, which another bailiff described as acting at times "like an overturned beehive," officials adopted an impromptu system using numbered pa-

per squares to allow the first 30 comers a coveted courtroom seat.

Eager for a glimpse

But many stubless spectators stayed anyway, watching in the anterooms, waiting for a recess when they could catch a glimpse of the players in the saga.

"Mostly curiosity" is what brought Exeter's Charlotte Swanson, 72, and one of her neighbors, she said. The two were intrigued "by those boys and how they were led astray in their youthfulness," Swanson said of the prosecution's allegations. "It's like a storybook, but you know it's real."

A 39-year-old rehabilitation consultant who asked not to be named said he was fascinated by the story and was trying to figure out why and how it all happened.

"You see this kind of thing and you know it'll be a TV movie soon. You'll see it in the news. I wanted to see it actually going on for myself," he said.

Lita Levesque, 15, and Maureen Fitzgerald, 17, both students at Exeter High School, had been glued to the trial at home and decided to come and watch in person - trading a home TV for the closed-circuit TV

in an anteroom. But they were not disappointed and said they would be back today, when the trial resumes after a one-day break.

"I can't believe something big like this happened around here," said Levesque. "And I don't understand how they all thought they could pull this off," she said, referring to the boys and the allegations about 23-year-old Pamela Smart.

A bailiff added, "Everyone's talking about that. It's almost like it was a death wish for Pamela. I say it's like Winston Churchill said: If you tell a secret to three people, the only way it will stay a secret is if two of them are dead."

Defendant causes a stir

A few minutes later, court adjourned for the day and a hush fell over the bystanders as Smart, closely guarded, walked out of the courtroom. She was wearing a soft pink silk blouse and a flowing white skirt, and many were struck by her appearance.

"To think that someone like her - petite and good-looking, almost like a princess - could have plotted something like this," said Chris Daignault, 17, alluding to the charges that Smart faces. "In a lineup of 100 people, she'd be one of the

last ones you'd pick," said Daignault, a student at Winnacunnet High School in Hampton.

The three teen-agers who have admitted roles in Gregory Smart's murder were students at Winnacunnet High, where Pamela Smart worked as media services director. Daignault had taken classes with the three, who were "always quiet," he said, "and didn't cause any problems."

Like many of his classmates, Daignault said, he was stunned by news of the murder and keen to see how it would develop.

The courthouse atmosphere was like "a zoo, or like being crammed into a sardine can, or maybe like in one of those medieval hangings when people come just to be there and be able to say they saw it happen," Daignault observed.

Not everyone thought all the attention was appropriate.

Paul J. Brown, 13, a student at Nettle School in Haverhill, Mass., had come to the courthouse with his mother, who was attending to other business. Paul had lingered to take in the scene at the Smart trial.

"They're turning it into a side-show freak instead of a regular court case. Even if she's guilty, I don't think that's right," he said. "It's rude."